

## Being a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

It has been reported in these pages and elsewhere that Pope Francis announced a Synod of Bishops for late 2023. Bishops, laity and clergy from across the globe will meet in Rome. The Rome meeting will share with the Pope the outcomes of global listening sessions happening during these next several months, including here in our diocese. The entire effort has been titled Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.

We have opened a page on our diocesan website that will complement information in The Catholic Moment about our efforts.

The term ‘synod’ denotes traveling together. And while synods were highlighted by the Second Vatican Council, it cited their role in ‘being Church’ as far back as Acts of the Apostles. People brought together varied experiences and aspirations under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Synodality has been a continuous feature in Catholic Church history, both at the diocesan and global levels. Our Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana held a legislative synod in 1958. More recent consultations here have mirrored that dynamic.

Our preliminary planning team is in place, and it will be our liaison with the national office at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in Washington, D.C. Our team consists of Father Ted Dudzinski, Vicar General of our diocese; Gabby Hlavek, Director of Communications; Rob Hartley, Director of the Office of Evangelization, Family Life and Pastoral Ministries; and Claudia Sadowski from our Office of Hispanic Ministry.

This current synod invites a prayerful participation by each of us. From our preparatory work and throughout the process, the Pope reminds us that it is essential to ask the help of the Holy Spirit at every turn. Just as most of us do not feel dressed if we leave the house without our cell phone, so too we must carry the Spirit everywhere we go. Our overall intention is to help the Church be the Church.

Early on in this process, the Holy Father reminded us of what this synod process is not. It is not a referendum on a particular issue. It is not a parliament assembled to create new laws. It is not a town hall meeting. It is a prayerful effort to listen to the Holy Spirit and to each other.

Between the preparatory suggestions from Rome and the advice of our local team, some starter questions or themes will be provided for each listening session.

By March we will have had our listening gatherings of representative groups. This synod depends on the parish/pastorate encounters. We are contemplating a few other groups that may be related by age, mission, or primary language. As the records of these listening sessions are assembled, we will be able to assemble the main themes of what “bubbles up.” These themes will then be reported to the national bishops’ conference, along with those from the other dioceses. Each diocese is limited to a ten-page summary due at the USCCB in June. It will take some time to construct our report, and it will be published.

Bishops' conferences around the world will process what they have heard so that each can contribute to the final meetings in Rome.

At each level of these efforts, we must seek the truth, encounter the words of Jesus in the Scriptures, and so help the Church be as it should.

Our prayers are more than requested, they are necessary both to shape our hearts and to enable Spirit-guided moments.